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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002319

SIPDIS

FOR SA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Tensions rise incrementally as LTTE demands EPDP leave Jaffna; GSL supports EPDP's political rights

Ref: Colombo 2184

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, DCM. Reasons 1.5  
(b,d).

**¶1. (C) SUMMARY:** The last few weeks have seen continued tension between the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The tension was briefly highlighted when the LTTE stated that the EPDP must leave Jaffna. In return, the EPDP is accusing the LTTE of instigating violent clashes. Despite the clashes the EPDP is generally satisfied that the GSL is protecting the EPDP's legitimate political activities. There is some concern by the opposition that the GSL may not maintain the EPDP's protection if the LTTE pushes the issue, however. END SUMMARY.

Recent incidents

**¶2. (SBU)** The past couple of weeks have seen an incremental increase in tensions between the LTTE and the also Tamil EPDP. Incidents between the EPDP and the LTTE are not new; the EPDP is historically anti-LTTE and has cooperated with previous governments in attacking them. The most recent round of incidents appears to have been sparked by the EPDP opening new political offices in the Jaffna area of northern Sri Lanka in November. The expansion immediately led to clashes between local communities and the EPDP cadre, as reviewed in Reftel. GSL security forces briefly suppressed the most violent clashes. The continuation of the clashes can be seen in the newspaper headlines of the last week, which include these headlines from "The Island" (an anti-peace process English language paper):

-- December 14, "Unidentified gang hurls bomb at EPDP office"

-- December 13, "LTTE bombs damage EPDP office"

-- December 12, "Public may be involved in EPDP office attacks - IGP" (Inspector General of Police)

-- December 11, "Tigers trick students to attack EPDP office"

LTTE statement

**¶3. (SBU)** During a December 14 press conference, following a meeting of the Sub-committee on De-escalation and Normalization (SDN), Commander of the LTTE in the Batticaloa and Ampara Districts Colonel Karuna stated that the LTTE had put forward its "demand that the EPDP should be ousted from the Jaffna Peninsula." Karuna was also quoted as stating that "some elements are using the EPDP to derail the peace process." He accused the EPDP of instigating violent incidents throughout the peninsula. He further stated that the SDN has to give its "final decision" on this issue during the next meeting, currently scheduled for January 20.

**¶4. (SBU)** Karuna's comments were in contrast to a Norwegian Press Release on the SDN meeting itself. ((NOTE: The release commented on issues concerning GSL occupied High Security Zones and on the constructive atmosphere of the talks.)) Kethesh Loganathan, of the Center for Policy Alternatives (a well regarded local think tank), believes that Karuna's statements probably accurately reflect LTTE policies. He further commented that although Karuna probably revealed more than he should have, the media outlets controlled by the LTTE did not contradict any of Karuna's statements.

EPDP's stance

**¶5. (C)** The EPDP, in turn, accuses the LTTE of instigating violence against legal EPDP political offices. EPDP political advisor Dr. K. Vigneswaran stated that the LTTE is clearly the aggressor in the

recent spate of incidents, but that it will not be able to keep up the violence much longer. He said the LTTE was able to keep unrest going on Delft Island (an island between Sri Lanka and India that is a traditional stronghold of the EPDP) only for a couple of weeks. Eventually the people got tired of the LTTE bringing in a couple of hundred students to conduct protests, causing shops to close and preventing fishing. Eventually the local community wanted to return to normal. Vigneswaran indicated that the EPDP would hold out in areas of Jaffna until the same process occurs there.

**16.** (C) Vigneswaran added that the EPDP cadre were willing to continue their work because they were satisfied with the government's efforts to protect their political rights from LTTE instigated attacks. He added that the EPDP policy is that the LTTE can not kick them out; only the people can vote them out at the ballot box. Harim Peiris, a Presidential Spokesman, commented that the EPDP and the Security Forces have a history of working together so unless otherwise ordered the military and police will protect the rights of the EPDP. Peiris added that the GSL is currently doing the right thing in standing up to the LTTE on these demands.

Possible outcomes

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**17.** (C) Peiris expressed concern that if the EPDP's presence in Jaffna becomes a major stumbling block in the peace talks the GSL may back down "for the overall good." Where Vigneswaran sees the LTTE eventually backing down because the local Tamil community becomes tired of agitation, Peiris worried that the GSL would tire of resisting the LTTE and back down. Loganathan emphasized that even if the GSL wanted to accede to the LTTE demands it could not easily remove elected parliamentary officials from the districts they represent. On the other hand, Peiris believes that if the LTTE applies enough pressure the GSL will remove Security Force protection from EPDP offices. Vigneswaran added that the EPDP will stay as long as the agitation remains at the level of shouting, rock throwing, and intermittent firebombs; if shooting starts the EPDP will have to withdraw.

Comment

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**18.** (C) The current tensions surrounding the EPDP in Jaffna are by no means a crisis, but the string of incidents is one clear example of the obstacles the government must surmount in the current peace process. Despite the EPDP's history of being involved in disappearance, torture, extortion and other activities, it is a viable Tamil political party in Sri Lanka. The LTTE's demand that the EPDP be removed from Jaffna is one that brings into doubt recent LTTE pledges to allow other parties to operate in Tamil areas. Having said that, there is still a month to go before the next SDN meeting -- and the LTTE's deadline -- and much can happen to resolve this issue or bring another to the forefront.

**19.** (U) Minimize considered.

Wills